Twaweza Staff Immersion

Central Kenya

May 2013
What is immersion?

- **Opportunity for Twaweza staff:**
  - To experience the lives and realities that our work is supposed to address
  - To be “tuned in” – what issues matter and how people communicate about them, what brings about change in their lives, and by what mechanisms
  - To test the relevance of our organizational theory of change in a “real life” setting

- It is not an “intervention” and it is not a “research project”
How do we do it?

• With help from an organization with local presence, we approach a selection of non-urban families and ask them to host (a pair of) us for 4 days and 3 nights.

• We brief the families on the purpose (to participate in their daily life, to learn what things are important in their context)

• Families are not paid to host us, however:
  • We offer the households to keep the mosquito nets, solar lamps, and water treatment we bring with us.
  • We offer a token small payment at the end of our stay, to defray costs
2013: where and who

- North-central Kenya
  - Imenti North, Laikipia East, Nyeri North districts
- Host families were identified and briefed by Uwezo Kenya
- In total, we were 44 participants. Most were from Twaweza, but few joined us from partner Well Told Story (Kenya) and one from Hivos (Netherlands).
Methodology

• Before the immersion, we chose key questions to explore;
  • We keep these at the back of our minds, not asking them directly.
  • Instead we try to be open to what comes, and to surprise ourselves
  • We also encourage the participants to keep a daily diary of the observations and interactions.
• And at the end, hold a 1-day debrief session, to distill our experiences into useful lessons for the organization
What do we actually do?

• As the immersion is not a research exercise, the main methodology is to, well, immerse. By this, we mean:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>How to do it</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observing and listening</td>
<td>The art of saying nothing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asking questions</td>
<td>Ask without being directive; ask a lot of “why”; but in low key manner, talk to all kinds of people</td>
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<td>Participating as much as possible without being a nuisance</td>
<td>Go ahead and join in. This year, we picked coffee, worked in the fields, fetched water, peeled potatoes, milked cows, drank tea with visitors, just hung out and much more</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visiting selected services &amp; groups in community</td>
<td>Talk to those in key institutions and networks. We visited schools, health centers, religious groups, women’s co-ops, water points, pubs, small shops and more</td>
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The questions in the back of our mind

- What evidence do we see of the relevance of the 5 networks Twaweza has identified as “key” to reaching citizens with information?
- What role do we see for information in engendering citizen action?
- What does citizen action look like, specifically in the sectors of education, health, and water?
- Who are the agents of change?
What did we observe
What we observed: Mass media

• Radio and TV seemed to be very present in people’s daily lives (and TV appeared to be equally as widespread as radio).
  – Importantly, people also discussed the information received

• Access to media was widespread, but not uniform (in some cases, women had considerably less access than men)

• Families did not appear to regularly buy print media, but when it was available, everyone engaged with it and over a number of days
What we observed: Fast-moving consumer goods

- Little shops were pervasive everywhere

...however, most basic goods (oil, flour, sugar, etc.) got re-packaged into smaller quantities, and re-sold in non-descript plastic bags – challenging the notion that messages could effectively be spread on packages.
What we observed: Mobile telephones

• All households visited contained at least one (often multiple) mobile phones
• Mobile phones clearly amplified people’s ability to connect, meet, and organize
• There was a range of reactions to unsolicited text messages: some people deleted them quickly; others seemed to value getting them
• There is a (slow but steady) increase in availability of smart phones, which allow for greater interactivity and engagement
  • potentially a real boost to how information can be delivered
What we observed: Teachers

- There were many private schools (primary and secondary) for fairly poor families
- Private schools tended to be staffed by younger and more energetic teachers; who are paid relatively low wages
- Their pay is also directly tied to student performance
- In both public and private schools, head teachers can be powerful agents of change in the community (though this depends on the characteristics of the teacher)
What we observed: Religious networks

- Religious networks were ubiquitous and powerful – they exert significant influence over people’s opinions, social interactions, and time
- They seemed to be particularly important for women
- They can contribute significantly to improved service provision in a community (e.g., running schools, clinics, etc.)
- More than other networks, religious institutions are a double-edged sword: they unite people, but they can create divisions between the different denominations; they spur people to action around a particular issue, or they may promote a passive “god will provide” attitude
What we observed: New networks?

• Established local government and administrative structures
  – Clearly, they are influential. The question is, does Twaweza want to engage with them directly?
• Popular culture:
  – Music and film, sports events and personalities
  – Effective way to reaching young people - even in the most remote areas, young people knew the popular music and sports figures
• Women’s groups and cooperatives:
  – Very pervasive networks, and key for reaching women
• Possible new vehicles for spreading information:
  – Barber shops, salons
  – Dubbed DVDs
  – Community theatre
How will these observations influence our work?
Need a better understanding of the role of information in motivating citizen action

- Information may only take real shape (have resonance), become a useful (useable) tool once it is shared, debated, vetted through meaningful social relationships
- Most instances of change featured a specific person, a “champion” that made it happen
- Info needs to be accompanied with specific, concrete actions
Who are agents of change

- In some cases, the Twaweza “usual suspects”: head teachers, religious leaders
- Sometimes it is the local administration structures, and the wazees (“wise” people)
  - Though these groups can also be resistant to change
- Sometimes, it is individuals who take it upon themselves to have active roles in the community (outside the above structures)
  - Twaweza likes to call them positive “outliers”
  - Women’s groups (and their leaders) featured prominently
- Young people did not, by and large, feature as agents of change, with the possible exception of young teachers.
...change in what area or sector?

• Related to the 3 sectors relevant to Twaweza, we saw:
  – Significant engagement with the education system: from attending meetings, to collecting money in the community to hire extra teachers, to taking children out of under-performing schools and placing them in better (often private) ones
  – Significant engagement with water provision, such as collecting funds to maintain/repair water points and pumps
  – On the other hand, we didn’t observe much direct engagement with the health sector
• Economic pressure (“livelihood issues”) seems to drive much of the change: people are very resourceful and inventive in increasing their income
  – There was also a stated link between education and better income: many families spoke about investing in education because it means better income in the future
Insights for our implementation strategy:

• Re-evaluate the networks we focus on
  – Change tactics regarding fast-moving consumer goods?
  – Explore popular culture as well as established authority structures as new networks

• Consider working intensively with a (small) group of change agents (positive outliers) in the communities
  – Could be selected Uwezo volunteers; could be self-identified active citizens; could be leaders of women’s groups…

• Make information interactive: through mobile telephones, games & prizes, community theatre, etc.

• Try with renewed effort to get traction with religious organizations
  – Being careful to not be seen as partisan to any one denomination
Insights for our concepts and measurement:

• Experiment much more with delivery mechanisms and products:
  – Test ideas and products, **get feedback from users/citizens**, be iterative, nimble, pilot at small scale before going big

• Define citizen agency more sharply
  – And measure it

• Sharpen our causal narratives:
  – Which network --> which audience --> what specific action?
The proof of the pudding?

• How will we know whether this immersion has been meaningful for the organization? We commit to:
  – incorporating the lessons learned in our work, and to document and track this through our internal systems
  – publicizing our experiences and thoughts in blogs and articles, inviting further reflection
  – revisiting the key messages a year from now (May 2014), and assessing whether
    – We had taken them on board
    – We learned anything new as a result
  – And if the answer to the above is even partly a Yes, we commit to going on immersion again in 2014 and keep learning
Immersion 2013 participants, the smiles are an indicator of the thirst for learning